

In addition to this indication of the passages assignable to ballad sources and to the compiler, our investigation has also shown that the compiler of the *Gest*, besides an intimate knowledge of the Robin Hood ballads and a complete sympathy with them, was possessed of admirable artistic skill. His poem is not a mere mechanical stringing together of ballads, but a complete rehandling and fusion of ballads and mediaeval tales as well, into a unified narrative. Some of the ballads he used may have been composed from shorter ballads by others before him, but their present effective combination is with little doubt his alone. As to the personality of this compiler, his date and position in life, no definite information has been obtained in this study. He seems to the writer to have lived not in the fifteenth but in the fourteenth century, when the final *c*, of which so many cases occur in his poem,<sup>1</sup> was still in use, when the Robin Hood ballads, then widespread, must have been in their finest popular form, and when the democratic spirit of the lower classes would have been particularly stimulating to a compiler of ballads of Robin Hood, the friend of the poor, the enemy of greedy lords and churchmen.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding his thorough sympathy with the unlettered ballad muse, he must have been a man of some literary training: so carefully planned and constructed a poem cannot have been the product of a mere untutored ballad-singer. Perhaps he was a cleric in minor orders, perhaps a clerk turned minstrel of a superior kind. Whatever his identity, the humble rhapsode who compiled the *Gest of Robin Hood* has been to successive generations a source of wholesome pleasure and deserves to be ranked, though on a lower plane, with the author of "Gawain and the Green Knight" and the "Pearl," as one of the unknown masters of mediaeval English literature.

Concerning the bearing of the above results upon the question of the origin of epic, little can be said—partly owing to lack of space, and partly because the writer prefers to submit his conclusions to criticism before venturing to use them for the strengthening of any theories. Thus much, however, may be ventured: If the method of composition here attributed to the *Gest* be accepted as the *most probable*—and no more is claimed

<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 4, note 3.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Brandl, Paul's *Grundriss*, vol. II, part 1, p. 844.